

THE HILLMAN

An Unusual Love Story

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

GRILLOT, THE PLAYWRIGHT, WARNS LOUISE THAT BOTH THE PRINCE OF SEYRE AND JOHN LOVE HER, AND THAT THE PRINCE WILL BE A DANGEROUS ENEMY TO HIS RIVAL

Synopsis.—Louise Maurel, famous actress, was making a motor tour of the English Cumberland district, when her car broke down late one evening and she was forced to accept the overnight hospitality of Stephen and John Strangewey, reclusive woman haters living in a splendid old mansion on a great farm. Before she left next day she had captivated John and he had fascinated her. Three months later John, on a sudden impulse, went to London and looked up Louise. She was delighted to see him and introduced him to her friends of the artistic and dramatic world, among them Sophie, a light-hearted little actress, and Grailot, a playwright of remarkable mental gifts. The prince of Seyre, a wealthy French noble, whom he already knew, became his guide, and he entered the gay bohemian life of the city.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

The lights were lowered a few minutes later, and John paid the bill. "We've enjoyed our supper," Louise whispered, as they passed down the room. "The whole evening has been delightful!"

As they drove from Louise's to Grailot's, Louise leaned back in her corner. Although her eyes were only half closed, there was an air of aloofness about her, an obvious lack of desire for conversation, which the others found themselves instinctively respecting. Even Sophie's light-hearted chatter seemed to have deserted her, somewhat to John's relief.

They were in the very vortex of London's midnight traffic. The night was warm for the time of year, and about Leicester square and beyond the pavements were crowded with pedestrians, the women lightly and gaily clad, flitting, notwithstanding some sinister note about their movements, like butterflies or bright-hued moths along the pavements and across the streets. The procession of taxicabs and automobiles, each with its human freight of men and women in evening dress on their way home after an evening's pleasure, seemed endless.

Presently Sophie began to talk, and Louise, too roused herself. "I am only just beginning to realize," the latter said, "that you are actually in London."

"When I leave you," he replied, "I, too, shall find it hard to believe that we have actually met again and talked. There seems to be so much that I have to say," he added, looking at her closely, "and I have said nothing."

"There is plenty of time," she told him, and once more the signs of that slight nervousness were apparent in her manner. "There are weeks and months ahead of us."

"When shall I see you again?" he asked. "Whenever you like. There are no rehearsals for a day or two. Ring me up on the telephone—you will find my number in the book—or come and lunch with me tomorrow, if you like."

"Thank you," he answered; "that is just what I should like. At what time?" "Half past one. I will not ask either of you to come in now. You can come down tomorrow morning and get the books. Sophie, I think I am tired—tired," she added, with a curious little note of self-pity in her tone. "I am very glad to have seen you again, Mr. Strangewey," she said, lifting her eyes to his. "Good night!"

He helped her out, rang the bell, and watched her vanish through the swiftly opened door. Then he stepped back into the taxicab. Sophie retreated into the corner to make room for him.

"You are going to take me home, are you not?" she asked.

"Of course," he replied, his eyes still fixed with a shade of regret upon the closed door of Louise's little house. "No. 10 Southampton street," he told the driver.

They turned round and spun once more into the network of moving vehicles and streaming pedestrians. John was silent, and his companion, for a little while, humored him. Soon, however, she touched him on the arm. A queer gravity had come into her dainty little face.

"Are you really in love with Louise?" she inquired, with something of his own directness.

He answered her with perfect seriousness.

"I believe so," he admitted, "but I should not like to say that I am absolutely certain. I have come here to find out."

Sophie suddenly rocked with laughter.

"You are the dearest, queerest madman I have ever met!" she exclaimed, holding tightly to his arm. "You sit there with a face as long as a fiddle, wondering whether you are in love with a girl or not! Well, I am not going to ask you anything more. Tell me, are you tired?"

"Not a bit," he declared. "I never had such a ripping evening in my life." She held his arm a little tighter. She was the old Sophie again, full of life and gaiety.

"Let's go to the Aldwych," she suggested, "and see the dancing. We can just have something to drink. We needn't have any more supper."

The cab stopped a few minutes later outside what seemed to be a private house. The door was opened at once. Sophie wrote John's name in a book, and they were ushered by the manager, who had come forward to greet them, into a long room, brilliantly lit, and filled, except in the center, with supper tables. John looked around him curiously. The popping of champagne was almost incessant. A gay, festive atmosphere, mingled with the pop of champagne, filled the air. The tables were

half of the women, several more of whom were now dancing, hung about the place. A girl in fancy dress was passing a great basket of flowers from table to table.

Sophie sat with her head resting upon her hands and her face very close to her companion's, keeping time with her feet to the music.

"Isn't this rather nice?" she whispered. "Do you like being here with me, Mr. John Strangewey?"

"Of course I do," he answered heartily. "Is this a restaurant?"

She shook her head. "No, it's a club. We can sit here all night, if you like."

"Can I join?" he asked. She laughed as she sent for a form and made him fill it in.

"Tell me," he begged, as he looked around him, "who are these girls? They look so pretty and well-dressed, and yet so amazingly young to be out at this time of night."

"Mostly actresses," she replied, "and musical-comedy girls. I was in musical comedy myself before Louise rescued me."

"Did you like it?"

"I liked it all right," she admitted, "but I left it because I wasn't doing any good. I can dance pretty well, but I have no voice, so there didn't seem to be any chance of my getting out of the chorus; and one can't even pretend to live on the salary they pay you, unless one has a partner."

"But these girls who are here tonight?"

"They are with their friends, of course," she told him. "I suppose, if it hadn't been for Louise, I should have been here, too—with a friend."

"I should like to see you dance," he remarked. In a hurry to change the conversation.

"I'll dance to you some day in your rooms, if you like," she promised. "Or would you like me to dance here? There is a man opposite who wants me. Would you rather I didn't? I want to do just what would please you most."

"Dance, by all means," he insisted. "I should like to watch you."

She nodded, and a minute or two later she had joined the small crowd in the center of the room, clasped in the arms of a very immaunulate young man who had risen and bowed to her from a table opposite. John leaned back in his place and watched her admiringly. Her feet scarcely touched the ground. She never once glanced at or spoke to her partner, but every time she passed the corner where John was sitting, she looked at him and smiled.

His eyes grew brighter, and he smiled back at her. She suddenly released her hold upon her partner and stretched out her arms to him. Her body swayed backward a little. She

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he said. "You're Strangewey, aren't you?" "Lord Amerton, of course!" John exclaimed. "I thought your face was familiar. Why, we played in the rackets doubles together!"

"And won 'em, thanks to you," Amerton replied. "Are you up for long?" "I am not quite sure," John told him. "I only arrived last night."

"Look me up some time, if you've nothing better to do," the young man suggested. "Where are you hanging out?"

"The Milan."

"I am at the Albany. So long! Must get back to my little lady."

He bowed to Sophie and departed. She sank a little breathlessly into her chair and laid her hand on John's arm. Her cheeks were flushed, her bosom was rising and falling quickly.

"I am out of breath," she said, her head thrown back, perilously near to John's shoulder. "Lord Amerton dances well. Give me some champagne!"

"And you—you dance divinely!" he told her, as he filled her glass.

"If we were alone," she whispered, "I should want you to kiss me!"

The stem of the wine glass in John's fingers snapped suddenly, and the wine trickled down to the floor. A passing waiter hurried up with a napkin, and a fresh glass was brought. The affair was scarcely noticed, but John remained disturbed and a little pale.

"Have you cut your hand?" Sophie asked anxiously.

"Not at all," he assured her. "How hot it is here! Do you mind if we go?"

"Go?" she exclaimed disconsolately. "I thought you were enjoying yourself so much!"

"So I am," he answered, "but I don't quite understand—"

He paused.

"Understand what?" she demanded. "Myself, if you must know."

She set down the glass which she had been in the act of raising to her lips.

"How queer you are!" she murmured. "Listen. You haven't got a wife or anything up in Cumberland, have you?"

"You know I haven't," he answered. "You're not engaged to be married, have you no ties, you came up here perfectly free, you haven't even said anything yet—do Louise?"

"Of course not."

"Well, then—," she began. Her words were so softly spoken that they seemed to melt away. She leaned forward to look in his face.

"Sophie," he begged, with sudden and almost passionate earnestness, "be kind to me, please! I am just a simple, stupid countryman, who feels as if he had lost his way. I have lived a solitary sort of life—an unnatural one, you would say—and I've been brought up with some old-fashioned ideas. I know they are old-fashioned, but I can't throw them overboard all at once. I have kept away from this sort of thing. I didn't think it would ever attract me—I suppose because I didn't believe it could be made so attractive. I have suddenly found out—that it does!"

"What are you going to do?" she whispered.

"There is only one thing for me to do," he answered. "Until I know what I have come to London to learn, I shall fight against it."

"You mean about Louise?"

"I mean about Louise," he said gravely.

Sophie came still closer to him. "Why are you so foolish?" she murmured. "Louise is very wonderful. In her place, but she is not what you want in life. Has it never occurred to you that you may be too late?"

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "I believe what the world believes, what some day I think she will admit to herself—that she cares for the prince of Seyre."

"Has she ever told you so?"

"Louise never speaks of these things to any living soul. I am only telling you what I think. I am trying to save you pain—trying for my own sake as well as yours."

He paid his bill and stooped to help her with her cloak. Her heart sank, her lips quivered a little. It seemed to her that he had passed to a great distance.

"Very soon," John said, "I shall ask Louise to tell me the truth. I think that I shall ask her, if I can, tomorrow!"

matters, quite unimportant in themselves, concerning which a little advice in the beginning may save you trouble."

"Very good of you, I am sure," John repeated. "To tell you the truth, I was just looking through the telephone directory to see if I could come across the name of a tailor I used to have some things from."

"If it pleases you to place yourself in my hands," the prince suggested, "I will introduce you to my own tradespeople. I have made the selection with some care. I have, fortunately, an idle morning, and it is entirely at your disposal. At half past one I believe we are both lunching with Miss Maurel."

John was conscious of a momentary sense of annoyance. His tete-a-tete with Louise seemed farther off than ever. At the prince's suggestion, however, he fetched his hat and gloves and entered the former's automobile, which was waiting below.

They spent the morning in the neighborhood of Bond street, and John had the foundations of a wardrobe more extensive than any he had ever dreamed of possessing. At half past one they were shown into Louise's little drawing room. There were three or four men already present, standing around their hostess and sipping some faint yellow cordial from long Venetian glasses.

Louise came forward to meet them, and made a little grimace as she remarked the change in John's appearance.

"Honestly, I don't know you, and I don't believe I like you at all!" she exclaimed. "How dare you transform yourself into a tailor's dummy in this fashion?"

"It was done entirely out of respect for you," John said.

"In fact," the prince added, "we considered that we had achieved rather a success."

"I suppose I must look upon your effort as a compliment," Louise sighed, "but it seems queer to lose even so much of you. Shall you take up your manners and our habits, Mr. Strangewey, as easily as you wear our clothes?"

"That I cannot promise," he replied. "The brain should adapt itself at least as readily as the body," the prince remarked.

M. Grailot, who was one of the three men present, turned around.

"Who is talking platitudes?" he demanded. "I write plays, and that is my monopoly. Ah, it is the prince, I see! And our young friend who interrupted us at rehearsal yesterday."

Grailot held out his left hand to the prince and his right to John.

"Mr. Strangewey," he said, "I congratulate you! Any person who has the good fortune to interest Miss Maurel is to be congratulated. Yet must I look at you and feel myself puzzled. You are not an artist—no? You do not paint or write?"

John shook his head.

"Mr. Strangewey's claim to distinction is that he is just an ordinary man," Louise observed. "Such a relief, you know, after all our clever people!"

John shook hands with everybody and sipped the contents of the glass which had been handed to him. Then a butler opened the door and announced luncheon. Louise offered her hand to the prince, who stepped back.

"It shall be the privilege of the stranger within our gates," he decided. Louise turned to John with a little smile.

"Let me show you, then, the way to my dining room. I ought to apologize for not asking some women to meet you. I tried two on the telephone, but they were engaged."

"I will restore the balance," the prince promised, turning from the contemplation of one of the prints hanging in the hall. "I am giving a supper party tonight for Mr. Strangewey, and I will promise him a preponderance of your charming sex."

"Am I invited?" Louise inquired. The prince shook his head.

"Alas, no!"

They passed into a small dining room and here again John noticed that an absolute simplicity was paramount. The round table, covered with an exquisitely fine cloth, was very simply laid. There was a little glass of the finest quality, and a very little silver. For flowers there was only one bowl, in the center.

"A supper party to which I am not invited," said Louise, as she took her place at the table and motioned John to a seat by her side, "fills me with curiosity. Who are to be your guests, prince?"

"Calavera and her sprites," the prince announced.

Louise paused for a moment in the act of helping herself to hors d'oeuvres. She glanced toward the prince. For a moment their eyes met. Louise's lips were faintly curled. It was almost as if a challenge had passed between them. Louise devoted her attention to her guest.

"First of all," she asked, "tell me how you like my little friend?"

"I think she is charming," John answered without hesitation. "We went to a supper club last night and stayed there till about half past three."

"Really," said Louise, "I am not sure that I approve of this! A supper club with Sophie until half past three in the morning!"

He looked at her quickly.

"You don't mind?"

"The greater part of my experiment," he pointed out, "needs the help of only one person, and that person is you."

She moved a little uneasily in her chair. It might have been his fancy, but he imagined that she glanced under her eyelids toward the prince of Seyre. The prince, however, had turned almost ostentatiously away from her. He was leaning across the table, talking to Faraday.

"You have not lost your gift of plain speech," she observed. "So delightful in Cumberland and Utopia, so impracticable here!"

"Then since we can't find Utopia, come back to Cumberland," he suggested.

A reminiscent smile played for a moment about her lips.

"I wonder," she murmured, "whether I shall ever again see that dear, wonderful old house of yours, and the mist on the hills, and the stars shining here and there through it, and the moon coming up in the distance?"

"All these things you will see again," he assured her confidently. "It is be-

cause I want you to see them again that I am here."

"Just now, at this minute, I feel a longing for them," she whispered, looking across the table, out of the window, to the softly waving trees.

At the close of the luncheon for a moment she and John were detached from the others.

"I want to see you alone," he said. "When can I?"

"I am so busy!" she murmured. "Next week there are rehearsals nearly every minute of the day."

"Tomorrow," John said insistently. "You have no rehearsals then. I must see you. I must talk to you without this crowd."

It was his moment. Her half-formed resolutions fell away before the compelling ring in his voice and the earnest pleading in his eyes.

"I will be in," she promised, "tomorrow at six o'clock."

After the departure of her guests, Louise stood before the window of her drawing room, looking down into the street. She saw the prince courteously motion John to precede him into his waiting automobile. She watched until the car took its place in the stream of traffic and disappeared. The sense of uneasiness which had brought her to the window was unaccountable, but it seemed in some way deepened by their departure together. Then a voice from just behind startled her. It was Grailot, who had returned noiselessly into the room.

"I returned," he explained. "An impulse brought me back. A thought came into my mind. I wanted to share it with you as a proof of the sentiment which I feel exists between us. It is my firm belief that the same thought, in a different guise, as you watched the departure of your guests."

She motioned him to a place upon the couch, close to where she had already seated herself.

"Come," she invited, "prove to me that you are a thoughtful reader!"

He sank back in his corner. His hands, with their short, stubby fingers, were clasped in front of him. His eyes, wide open and alert, seemed fixed upon her with the ingenious inquisitiveness of a child.

"To begin, then, I find our friend, the prince of Seyre, a most interesting, I might almost say fascinating, study."

Louise did not reply. After a moment's pause, he continued.

"Among the whole aristocracy of France there was no family so loathed and detested as the seigneurs of Seyre at the time of the revolution. Those at the chateau in Orleans and others who were arrested in Paris, met their death with singular contempt and calm. Eugene of Seyre, whose character in my small way I have studied, is of the same breed."

Louise took up a fan which lay on the table by her side, and waved it idly in front of her face.

"One does so love," she murmured, "to hear one's friends discussed in a friendly spirit!"

"It is because Eugene of Seyre is a friend of yours that I am talking to you in this fashion," Grailot continued. "You have also another friend—this young man from Cumberland."

"Well?"

"In him," Grailot went on, "one perceives all the primitive qualities which go to the making of splendid manhood. Physically he is almost perfect, for

which alone we owe him a debt of gratitude. He has, if I judge him rightly, all the qualities possessed by men who have been brought up free from the taint of cities, from the smear of our spurious civilization. He is chivalrous and unassuming. He is also, unfortunately for him, the enemy of the prince."

Louise laid down her fan. She no longer tried to conceal her agitation.

"Why are you so melodramatic?" she demanded. "They have scarcely spoken. This is, I think, their third meeting."

"When two friends," Grailot declared, "desire the same woman, then all of friendship that there may be between them is buried. When two others, who are so far from being friends that they possess opposite qualities, opposite characters, opposite characteristics, also desire the same woman—"

"Don't!" Louise interrupted, with a sudden little scream. "Don't! You are talking wildly. You must not say such things!"

Grailot leaned forward. He shook his head very slowly; his heavy hand rested upon her shoulder.

Do you think that Louise has been too close a friend to the prince? And is John Strangewey, with his old-fashioned ideas of rectitude, a fool to be letting himself fall head over heels in love with her?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CIGAR AS OPIUM SUBSTITUTE

Aiding in Redemption of China, Where Natives Are Now Frequently Seen Smoking Their Cheroots.

The cigar is doing a large part in the redemption of China. It is no uncommon thing to see a native smoking his cheroot, which promises to enjoy the favor once bestowed on opium.

The import of cigars into various Chinese ports has been greatly on the increase in the last few years, and now amounts to about \$350,000 annually. Of this trade four-fifths normally is through Hongkong. There has been a marked increase in the quantity of Dutch-made cigars used in South China and other portions of the Far East during the last year or more, where, for various reasons, Philippine cigars have been losing in favor.

Previous to the outbreak of the war in Europe considerable quantities of cheap cigars were sold in China and the Far East through German firms in Hongkong, and a German cigar factory was operated in Hongkong for the manufacture of cheap cigars for the Chinese trade and also for export to Europe. This factory is still operated under Chinese control.

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